

Vayakhel-Pekudei And He Assembled-Accountings

Torah: Ex. 35:1-40:38

Haftarah: Ezek. 45:16-46:18

Brit Chadashah: Heb. 9:1-11

HaChodesh: Ex. 12:1-20

This week's Torah portion is a triple portion. It deals with the last details which had to be considered before the ark was finally completed. It ends with a description of the first time the tabernacle was set up – which was on the first day of the first month of the second year after the departure from Egypt. All that happens in the book of Leviticus occurs during this same time period. It was a time when the House of Jacob was to get organized into a holy nation whose existence centered around both the ritual presence of the L-rd and the practice of the righteousness which the L-rd requires from those who would walk with Him.

This last week, I taught a course in Camrose on the Patriarchs and one of the main points I emphasized is that our walk with the L-rd has **two inseparable aspects** – **spirituality** and **morality**. Spirituality involves setting up and maintaining a **regular intimate devotional celebration** of the presence of the L-rd, both individually and corporately. This corporate, individual devotion is expressed through the double practices of **authentic biblical morality** – **righteousness (doing that which is right)** and **justice (fixing that which is wrong)**.

Before Israel was ready to leave the safety of the wilderness isolation and proceed to the Promised Land, the nation had to learn how to **implement** and to **balance** these two sets of parallel requirements – **the practice of authentic spiritual devotion and the practice of authentic biblical morality**. This integration and this balance remain the greatest challenge for believers, since the lack of balance in either one will lead to an imbalance in the integration of both.

As we come again to the marvellous season of Pesach, we need to re-examine both aspects of our walk with the L-rd so that our lives, both as individuals and as a corporate faith community do not lapse into a period of wilderness wandering.

The Haftarah portion speaks of a somewhat diminished preparation for a new beginning which the remnants of Israel were preparing for from the humbling experience of the captivity. They knew that G-d's faithfulness would eventually allow them to return home to rebuild the nation of Israel in the land of Canaan. One of the weaknesses of the nation from the conquest onwards was the tendency of the rulers to neglect their spiritual devotion and the moral integration of their faith.

The hope of the captives was that a new Kingdom would be established which would prepare the way for the promised Messiah, who would fulfill all that was promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and inaugurate the eternal kingdom of David's greater Son over all the nations and generations of all mankind. When the re-establishment fizzled and when the restored temple and the restored kingdom did not usher in the messianic age, both the Jews who had returned home to Israel and those who continued to spread out all over the known world, took matters into their own hands. There were two main revolts against Roman domination and a whole series of minor revolts which lead to both the destruction of the Second Temple and to the near destruction of the Jewish nation.

The scattered remnants of the House of Jacob who survived the three centuries of civil unrest and slaughter set up an interesting form of Judaism, which can be viewed as both permanently on hold as far as the promises of the Kingdom are concerned and ritually based on three things. First, modern rabbinic Judaism, in all of its forms, is based on the remembrance of Israel's deliverance from slavery and from captivity and on the study of the devotional documents which deal with Israel's spiritual experience, both biblical and traditional.

Secondly, it is also based on the practice of as many of the rituals of the temple and the tabernacle which are possible until another temple is built. Thirdly, modern rabbinic Judaism is also concerned with the promises of G-d which are yet to be fulfilled for Israel, and as such, it is a religion of hope based on the imminent arrival of the Messiah to fulfill all that is written. Modern Judaism looks back to the glories and to the defeats of the past. Modern Judaism looks around and attempts to set up and maintain devotional communities where faith is expressed and where biblical and traditional morality are practice. Modern Judaism is also focused on eternity and on the eternal kingdom of David's greater Son.

Jewish communities around the world view the arrival of the Season of Passover with renewed hope in the promises of G-d and with renewed determination to walk according to their understanding of the ways of the L-rd so that even though they may not recognize the Messiah when He comes, He will at least recognize them.

I have again combined my sermon with the Torah portion to speak to you of our understanding the spiritual destiny of the Jewish people from a Messianic Jewish perspective and what part we are called to play in the fulfilment of all that is promised. I want to do this in three parts. First I want to speak to you of our understanding of the dual, even triple nature of Messiah's redemptive ministry. Next I want to speak to you about our approach to both ritual and to morality and I want to finish with a call for the same kind of spiritual preparation and spiritual anticipation which the House of Israel was experiencing as the prepared to finally leave the wilderness after nearly two years of Bible School.

The Bible describes the redemptive ministry as a threefold process. He was first to come and offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the salvation of all mankind. As part of this aspect of His ministry, He was to teach and to equip a team of witnesses who were to take the wonderful message of G-d's love in Messiah to the ends of the earth, and so bless both the great nation of Abraham and also all the nations and generations of mankind. Once this process of proclamation was set in place, the next phase of our Messiah's ministry is the one which He is performing now and which He will continue to perform until His return – He is praying for us and applying both salvation and forgiveness to all believers who call upon His name.

When the time is right and all the signs are in place, He will perform the final phase of His ministry – one which will issue in the eternal Kingdom of G-d in a completely renewed cosmos. This ushering in of the kingdom has itself three distinct stages. First He will leave the holy of holies and cause this present age and this present universe to immediately dissolve and be destroyed. Next He will cause all mankind to resurrect and stand before Him to be judged and rewarded for the contents of their hearts and lives. Once this final court of final appeals has finished its work, then He will release the final phase of His redemptive ministry and allow His bride, the Heavenly Jerusalem to be set up with a glory which surpasses the setting up of the Tabernacle in this week's portion – and which also surpasses the glory of the construction of either Solomon's temple or the temple which Herod finished.

There are not two Messiah's. There is one Messiah whose redemptive intervention is threefold, not twofold. Rabbinic Judaism believes in two messiahs: Ben Joseph, who will suffer for the sins of the world (which function they wrongly believe the incredible sufferings of the Jewish people is accomplishing, because He suffered and died first for His people and then for all peoples) and Ben David, who they believe will come in glory and establish G-d's everlasting Messianic Kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. This is the final stage of our beloved messiah's redemptive ministry and where we have the most agreement with modern Rabbinic Judaism. However, we acknowledge that there is no second Messiah.

It is the same Messiah who came once who will return once, once He has fulfilled His current cosmic portfolio of ruling and reigning over the spiritual realm of this present age until He has put all enemies under His foot stool and everybody who responds to His Spirit's voice is spiritually welcomed into G-d's kingdom, while we patiently await the end of the world with both faith and obedience.

This faith and obedience are the dual aspects of authentic biblical spirituality which all the rituals and symbols and commandments of the Torah portray for us. Are you ready to leave the wilderness and see the promises of G-d performed in your life? How is your devotional intimacy doing – is it a once in a while thing, a once a week thing, or is it a daily feature of your walk with the L-rd? How is your moral application of your devotional intimacy doing? Are there areas of your life which are not under the control of the moral requirements of His Word? Is His tabernacle built and maintained in your heart, or is crumbling in one of both of the two essential aspects of our walk with the Messiah our King?

As we approach Passover, we must not let either our devotional intimacy or our biblical morality suffer from neglect and not be ready for our annual triple spiritual whammy and I will close with this. We are preparing to celebrate the Seder and symbolically re-enact our deliverance from Egypt. We are preparing to celebrate the death and resurrection of our beloved Messiah, who died and who rose to give us everlasting life.

We are also preparing to celebrate an aspect of His ministry which is not emphasized enough, in my humble opinion – He now tabernacles (dwells) among us and guides us from victory unto victory – or from wilderness to captivity (and sometimes even to exile) until we learn to take on His full armour and defeat all the spiritual and moral opponents which rise up against His kingdom in the hearts and lives of each one of us, and in the life of our congregation (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

We will be discussing the progress of both aspects of this intervention/conflict during our AGM after the service. I have selected my seven verses from the final chapter of today's regular Torah portion and I want to close my sermon/meditation by reading them with you Torah. Let's open our Bibles and turn to Ex. 40:16, 17 and 34-38.

Amen. Let's pray.